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NEW YORK TIMES
29 APRIL 1980

Rescue

U.S. Task Force Planned to Free Three Diplomats

Small Group Was to Enter Iranian Foreign Ministry

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 28—Carter Administration officials said today that if the effort to rescue American hostages in Teheran had gone according to plan last week, United States paramilitary forces infiltrated into Iran early this year, would have slipped into the Foreign Ministry to free three American diplomats held captive there since November.

Details of the plan to rescue the diplomats indicated that the assault at the Foreign Ministry would have been carried out by a small force of raiders in coordination with the main rescue attempt at the United States Embassy less than a mile away.

When the diplomats were free, according to officials close to the rescue mission, they would have been taken to the embassy and flown out of Teheran along with the 50 hostages held there.

Officials also revealed today that American intelligence agents infiltrated into Iran personally reconnoitered landing areas in the desert and near Teheran that had been selected for use by the rescue force. These inspections, which took place in recent weeks, indicated that the landing zones could be secured and would remain undetected during the rescue mission, officials said.

Traffic Came as Surprise

The appearance of a bus and a truck at the desert location just as American planes were landing last Thursday night was "completely unanticipated," according to one official. He said intelligence reports indicated that no vehicular traffic would be encountered.

The disclosure of additional details about the mission came as questions continued to arise about the feasibility of the rescue effort.

Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are scheduled to discuss the mission tomorrow in executive session. Hearings may follow, committee officials said.

The Senate Armed Services Committee announced today that it had begun an investigation into the breakdown of three RH-53 helicopters, which forced cancellation of the mission. Chairman John C. Stennis, Democrat from Mississippi, said the investigation would focus on maintenance, training, supplies and performance.

The House Armed Services Committee also announced that it would hold hearings on the mission next week.

Crews Unaware of Mission

These hearings and inquiries, officials said, will focus on several key questions raised in the aftermath of the mission.

Helicopter performance is one. Military officials acknowledged today that the eight helicopters used in the mission were maintained by crews aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz that were unaware of the rescue mission and the strains it would place on the aircraft.

The helicopters used in the mission were also not the same ones that had been flown successfully in the United States during practice runs, officials said. Senior Administration officials have said that security considerations prevented transporting the helicopters used in practice to the Nimitz for use in the mission.

Another issue that will be examined, according to Senate investigators, is the command structure used in the mission. The mix of Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine personnel, plus the deployment of paramilitary forces in Teheran, created a potentially confusing line of command, officials said.

Congressional committees will also try to determine whether military officials were certain that the mission was feasible. Top civilian officials in the Administration denied today that the rescue operation had been scaled down by the White House to reduce the chances for bloodshed.

Several top military officers, however, suggested that Pentagon doubts about the mission had been overridden by the White House.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown said last week that he and senior military officers had approved the mission and considered it feasible.